The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare

Volume 27
Issue 2 *June*

Article 11

June 2000

Review of *Kids Raised by the Government.* Ira M. Schwartz and Gideon Fishman. Reviewed by Sherrill Clark, University of California, Berkeley.

Sherrill Clark
University of California, Berkeley

reforms are sufficient to protect social security's viability without undermining its egalitarian principles.

The final chapter also provides a provocative and erudite analysis of the major challenges facing social security today—not only in the countries of the rich world, but in the developing world and the ex-Soviet nations. In the poor world, Dixon pointedly notes that social security remains largely irrelevant to the basic material needs of most ordinary people. Focussed on the urban middle class and public employees, social security generally bypasses the rural poor, especially women, as well as urban dwellers in the informal sectors of the economy. In the post-Soviet nations, as the reasonably generous cradle-to-the-grave social security systems of the past have decomposed, a variety of new, "mixed," and substantially less protective systems are evolving.

Dixon's book provides an important addition to the social security literature and a helpful contribution to comparative policy studies; his organizing categories offer a useful context for comparing and evaluating programs. While somewhat circumscribed in its analytic dimensions—Dixon largely ignores issues such as race, gender, and economic globalization—*Social Security in Global Perspective* is impressive in scope and scholarship, an outstanding addition to the burgeoning social security literature.

Paul Terrell
University of California, Berkeley

Ira M. Schwartz and Gideon Fishman, *Kids Raised by the Government*. Westport, CT:Praeger Publishers, 1999. $49.95 hardcover.

Over half a million children live in subsidized out of home care in the UnitedStates and their numbers are growing. Children from ethnic minority groups,especially African American children, are overrepresented. The authors of this bookassert that child welfare system dooms children to impermanent living arrangementsand poverty is the main reason. Hence: Kids are being raised by the governmentbecause, under the current system, they live in damaging impermanent relationshipspaid for by the government.

To begin, Schwartz and Fishman declare that the public child welfare system,created to combat child maltreatment, is so broken that nothing less than radical changewill improve the situation. Furthermore, they say that limiting the debate to internalphilosophical disagreements over the merits of family preservation versus earlypermanency, occurs at the expense of seeing the bigger picture. So far so good: thisbook will not be a rehash of Harlow's chicken wire mother experiments. They promisethe reader new strategies based on empirical research.

But then, inexplicably, the authors ignore the Adoption and Safe Families Act of1997 (P.L.105 - 89) in favor of analyzing the Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Actof 1980 (P.L. 96 -272). They contend that child welfare philosophy, simultaneouslyprotecting children and preserving families, is misguided. Citing class action suitsbrought against public child welfare agencies during the 1980s and 1990s, they presentcase examples of the system's inefficiency and inability to protect children. The nextthree chapters are intended to give readers insight into how the system has failed tohandle adoptions, the connection with the juvenile justice system, and the role ofresidential care.

The authors present adoption data from Michigan which shows that the youngera child is when s/he enters the system, the longer the stay. Additionally, infants andteenagers are the least likely to be adopted. They conclude that removing barriers toadoption should be first priority of reform. Reunification with parents should bereconsidered as a viable option for permanency.

Next, Schwartz and Fishman address the charge that the child welfaredependency system creates juvenile delinquents. Their research indicates that the age ofthe child at first contact with the system, they do so more frequently as juveniledelinquents rather than dependents. The goal of child welfare services turns fromcompassion to social control with children over the age of 10 or 12.

Finally the authors present research that implicates expensive residentialtreatment in maintaining status quo by keeping children in care longer than necessary. However, the data they use combines emergency shelters, group homes, andinstitutions under the umbrella of residential treatment.

This book's point about the bigger picture to confront poverty has merit. Forexample, increases in child neglect, the most

prevalent form of child maltreatment, arerelated to decreases in parental income. More child neglect is seen in poor families thanin middle class families. Yet poverty by itself cannot be seen as the cause of child neglectand other forms of maltreatment because not all poor parents neglect their children.However after making the point about poverty, Schwartz and Fishman do not presentresearch about or discuss child neglect in depth.

The authors conclude this book by making a series of recommendations. First,they do not recommend eliminating family preservation which is surprising,considering the arguments made in previous chapters. They recommend that familypreservation services should be focused on preventing expensive residential care,rather than family foster care. Second they say child abuse investigation should beseparated from services. They say managed care shows promise in the child welfarefield, but again their information is disconnected from the earlier arguments.

The Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 (P.L.105 - 89) has stimulateddiscussion of several legal permanency options for children. Kin care has always beenan informal resource for troubled families, although government is just nowconsidering it as a legal permanency alternative to adoption, rather than a long termfoster care arrangement. Children being raised in kin care make up the fastest growingsegment of kids raised by the government.' Increases in the lengths of stay in kin carecan be directly tied to poverty, but the authors do not discuss the research about kincare which shows that children stay longer in the system when placed with kin.

This book presents some new information, especially in the area of juvenilejustice. Nevertheless, the so-called radical new strategies, such as managed care, are notconnected with the earlier chapters. This leads to the conclusion that readers may havebeen better served by four separate research articles.

In the end, basing this inquiry on a dated policy and providing only a briefanalysis of the policy that superceded it, distracts from the worthy premise of this book:To improve the lives of impoverished families and establish permanence for childrenrequires us to think outside of the child welfare box. Increasing levels of domesticviolence, high rates of teen pregnancy, lack of affordable housing and child care,availability of illegal drugs, inadequacies

of health and education systems areimplicated. Schwartz and Fishman are correct: Congress, having tackled welfarereform, should now have the political will to reform child welfare and relate it to thesebroader issues.

Sherrill Clark
University of California, Berkeley

Howard Karger and Joanne Levine, *The Internet and Technology for the Human Services*, NewYork: Longman, 1999. $27.19 paperback.

Many have felt that human services and technology are strange bedfellows. Yet ourprofessional future depends on our comfort in adopting a full range of technological tools forimproving services and interventions. Few human service book authors have invested thepersonal and/or publishing resources on this fluid and rapidly transforming phenomenon. Kargerand Levine take on this risky endeavor and make a notable contribution to helping both theneophytes and the technologically savvy move toward the new millennium.

Experts note that the Internet is one of the fastest growing technologies of all time. Themetastasis of web sites, services, and sales creates multiple challenges for human serviceproviders. Tackling the nearly impossible, the authors successfully provide a comprehensiveresource for navigating the white water of technological advances.

Appropriately, Karger and Levine lay the framework for their discussion in Part I bypresenting an overview of the Internet that addresses the historical context of cyberspace. Withinthis venue, they also give a caveat to the ethical dilemmas human service administrators face asthey grapple with technology policy and the corresponding legal implications as they haveemerged in the Information Age.

In Part II of their presentation, the authors make the practical application of the Internet tothe human services milieu. They discuss the use of the Internet for multi-cultural exchange, networking, on-line counseling, and advancing telemedicine. They also provide readers with amyriad of resource ideas for using the Internet to conducting research.